

ORANGE & UNION STREETS NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY

Richard Coleman House
21 Union Street
Nantucket
Nantucket County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-904

HABS
MASS
10-NANT
76G-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

RICHARD COLEMAN HOUSE

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MASS
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76G-

Location: 21 Union Street (on west side of Union Street),
(formerly called Quanata Bank), Nantucket,
Massachusetts

Present Owner: Nantucket Historical Trust

Present Occupant: Unoccupied

Present Use: None

Brief Statement
of Significance: One of three gambrel-roof houses built in the
typical Nantucket plan with off-center door
and chimney.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

- 1796 -- Richard L. Coleman, housewright, purchased property "being at that part of the Island commonly called Quanata Bank" from Josiah Barker and Jethro Hussey, for \$440. This was land only.
- 1803 -- William Nichols purchased land, dwelling-house, shop and barn from Richard L. Coleman for \$2000.
- 1820 -- Silvanus Ewer bought from heirs of Nichols.
- 1826 -- Peter F. Ewer by deed from Silvanus Ewer.
- 1826 -- Leonard Fisher, boat builder, from Peter F. Ewer.
- 1835 -- James Alley bought for \$2,150.
- 1840 -- Asa Meiggs, shipwright, bought for \$1400, James Alley having moved to Maine.
- 1849 -- William H. Ceary, hat and cap maker, from Peleg Macy, assignee of property of Asa Meiggs, insolvent debtor.
- 1862 -- Otis F. Hamblen bought for \$350.
- 1877 -- Bridget Kiernan

- 1899 -- Owen Holland Jr. bought from Mary Kiernan,
heir of Bridget Kiernan.
- 1903 -- Margaret Holland. Property had been transferred
to her by husband Owen Holland Jr.
- 1908 -- Julia M. Wagner and brother, Max Wagner.
- 1914 -- Eva Barnard Chase
- 1916 -- Helen M. Sylvaro
- 1942 -- Alban K. Sylvaro inherited from mother.
- 1967 -- Acquired by Nantucket Historical Trust to be
preserved, rehabilitated, and sold for residential
use.

(Abstract, Records in Registry of Deeds, Nantucket)

2. Date of erection: Between 1796 and 1803. In 1796 Richard L. Coleman, a housewright, bought land only from Josiah Barker and Jethro Hussey for \$440. In 1803 when William Nichols bought from Coleman, the deed read, "land, dwelling-house, shop and barn" for \$2000. Therefore, it is presumed that Richard L. Coleman built the house soon after 1796.
 3. Architect: None. It is probable that Richard L. Coleman, being a housewright, built and designed the house himself.
 4. Original plans, construction, etc.: None. Farnham, in his book Brief Historical Data, 1915, wrote that the Nantucket Weekly Mirror carried an advertisement in 1862 offering this house for sale, "defining minutely its desirable features". A thorough search has been made at the Historical Association Museum, the Atheneum Library and the Inquirer and Mirror, at which latter place copies of the Mirror for 1862 were located; however, the only advertisements found were small ones in the issues of April 19th and 26th, reading as follows: "For sale or to let. The house on Union Street owned and lately occupied by William H. Geary. For particulars inquire of Joseph B. Macy or Stephen Easton".
 5. Notes on alterations and additions: Little change has been made. Date of addition at rear not known.
- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: In the 1730's Quanata (or Quantaty) Hill, better known later as "The Bank", on the easterly side of Orange Street, and which formerly extended much further to the eastward across what is now Union Street, was removed, the material taken away being used to fill the flats and low lands along the water front,

thus making several acres of new land. (Abstract, Story of Old Nantucket by William F. Macy, 1928).

William H. Geary, who owned the house from 1849 to 1862, is remembered in Nantucket history because of the fact that the Great Fire of 1846 started in his store at No. 5 Granite Block, Main Street. He was one of the principal business men in town, being a hat and cap maker and dealing also in men's furnishings. The fire originated from an overheated tailor's goose. Apparently he rebuilt or rented another store, as in 1861 he was advertising his hats and caps. He purchased the "home estate" on Union Street three years after the fire; it has not been determined where he lived at the time of the fire. Soon after 1862 Mr. Geary, who had come to Nantucket from New Brunswick, moved away from the Island.

Peter C. Ewer was deeded the house by his father Silvanus in 1826. He was largely responsible for introducing the "camels" to Nantucket in 1842. These were a sort of floating dry-dock, by means of which vessels drawing too much water to cross the Bar were lifted bodily and floated over the shoals. Peter C. Ewer's son Ferdinand, whose name appears in the deed of house from William H. Geary to Asa Meiggs, in 1869 made a survey of Nantucket and adjacent islands and drew the now famous map of Nantucket which bears his name.

Otis F. Hamblen owned the property in 1862 and was the son of Captain Joseph Hamblen who in 1861 kept a large livery stable nearby on Washington and Candle Streets. It was Captain Hamblen who spread the news to the Islanders that the opening shot had been fired in the Civil War, the "special signal" having been sighted on the incoming steamer from the walk on the Rotch Warehouse.

There is an interesting comparison of prices which the property brought in different times. In 1803 it sold for \$2000, and thirty-two years later for only \$150 more than that, while in 1840 James Alley, who was moving to Maine, sold for \$1400. When William H. Geary was leaving the Island in 1862, during the War years, the property brought but \$350, although there may possibly have been other considerations not mentioned.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: Photograph of south side in Ninety-Five Percent Perfect by Everett U. Crosby, Nantucket, 1953; drawing showing location of house "Under the Bank" in Nantucket, the Far-Away Island by William Oliver Stevens, New York, 1936; old drawing of Union Street before the

house was built in Nooks and Corners of the New England Coast by Samuel Adams Drake, New York, 1875; south view showing roofs in Scrapbooks of Miss Grace Brown Gardner (microfilm in Nantucket Atheneum).

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin
Nantucket, Massachusetts
August, 1966

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: A wood frame shingled house, typical Nantucket street facade with off center front door and chimney, gambrel roof (rare in Nantucket), basement kitchen, typical exterior and window trim.
2. Condition of fabric: Recently in poor condition and unoccupied for about two years, the house was acquired and rehabilitated by the Nantucket Historical Trust.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 26' - 7" by 38' - 3" plus ell, 16' - 11" by 13' - 4½"; structure under gambrel, 26' - 7" by 28' - 7½". Two stories with high basement, four bay front.
2. Foundations: Rubblestone, in some sections the stone is roughly dressed.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Wood frame, horizontal board sheathing, unpainted shingles weathered grey.
4. Structural system, framing: Post and beam, major timbers exposed on interior, stud walls, mortise and tenon, gambrel roof framing, purlins in upper slope only; new iron pipe columns in basement.
5. Porches: High, open entry porch in front with steps parallel to front of house in traditional Nantucket fashion.
6. Chimneys: Large central brick chimney.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Main (northeast) entry doorway with high, slightly curved attenuated pilasters, typical Nantucket trim, thin projecting shelf across top, five lights over door, door with seven recessed panels. Door in ell in northwest wall. New door in south wall of ell. Short double door in northwest basement wall.
- b. Windows and shutters: Projecting plank window frames, mortise and tenon, dowel fasteners, some early sash and panes. Nine-over-nine and twelve-over-twelve on street facade. Irregular spacing. No exterior shutters.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gambrel roof over front section of building, asphalt shingles. There may have been a one-story shed roof extension behind the house as indicated by old sheathing in attic. In late nineteenth century apparently a two-story gable roof extension and irregular gabled ell were added. Gable peak is at right angles to gambrel peak. Covering was originally wood shingles.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Box cornice on northeast front with fascia. Crown molding is formed by wood gutter, window frames form part of and project slightly from fascia trim, as found in other Nantucket houses. Rounded wood gutters form eaves on low roofing of ell, simple molded barge boards on gambrel.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: Entry door and stairs in second of four bays, small entry hall in first two bays, hall to rear spaces, two principal rooms front and back one either side of chimney, one room behind stairs, large passage between chimney and northwest wall, reworked ell to include new kitchen, pantry, and eating space.
- b. Second floor: Generally same as first except originally small closet in corner entry hall now a bathroom and closet; some later partitions here and in room behind stairs removed during rehabilitation.
- c. Attic: Remains of two small finished chambers at south end of unfinished attic, partitions removed; space under roof between gambrel and ell, early shingle fragments and sheathing; ladder to scuttle,

scuttle in southwest slope; new flooring.

- d. Basement: Kitchen originally at northeast (front) end of basement, dirt floor.
2. Stairways: First to second floor front: straight run, winders at top, square newel post at bottom and rectangular balusters, turned newel and balusters along second floor hall. Back stairs: winders at bottom and straight run. Second floor to attic: "L" shaped stair with winders at top, board railing at top. Ladder stair to scuttle. Stairs to basement: "L" shape with winders, not original.
3. Flooring: Random width wood flooring 8" - 14" on first floor; 14" - 20" on second floor. Before recent rehabilitation, painted decoration had survived on some floors, notably first floor front and back rooms and second floor front room, with traces of it in many other places where floor was not covered with old wall-to-wall carpet, indicating that it may have been all over original part of house. It ranged from dark (probably black) squirts in front room on first floor to diagonal strokes on second floor. Basement has dirt floor throughout, before recent work had wood floor except for brick in southwest room.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster on ceilings; plaster on some walls, some vertical beaded board partitions on second floor; paneling on fireplace walls of east rooms, first and second floors, and on fireplace wall of south room, first floor; wainscoting in first floor stairhall, stairway, and south room, first floor.
5. Doorways and doors: Most doors have four raised panels of approximately equal size, some doors with two recessed panels, board and batten door to attic stairs and in basement; lights in some doorways.
6. Decorative features and trim: First floor, south room, paneling here and in other rooms, thinly-molded bolection with double crossets around fireplace, simple cornice, window trim (replaced during rehabilitation) mitered at all four corners, bottom piece of window trim is on top of wainscoting. First floor, east room, simple cornice, two reeded pilasters rise up to ceiling on either side of fireplace (c. nineteenth century mantelpiece formerly here now stored in basement); capitals of pilasters form part of and project slightly from cornice; window trim is not original; (simple mirror board between windows, northeast wall, removed during rehabilitation). First floor, entry (before rehabilitation, picture molding, c. 1880's, plaster on wood elaborately decorated in white, red and gold graining on door to parlor, the entry hall and front parlor apparently underwent a thorough remodelling

in the late nineteenth century), hanging strip with dowels along south partition. Second floor, southeast room, simple paneling, thinly-molded bolection.

7. Notable hardware: First floor, new hardware, (before rehabilitation: simple three-part butt hinges); second floor all new hardware, (before rehabilitation wrought iron H-hinges generally, a couple of wrought iron HL's, also a couple of wrought iron latches); wood latch on door to attic stairs new.
8. Lighting, type of fixtures: Modern electric.
9. Heating: Originally fireplaces, later coal stoves in rooms, (coal in basement in 1966), modern hot water system; cooking fireplace in basement, oven in rear wall of chimney, hearths to first floor fireplace corbelled out from chimney mass.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. Orientation and general setting: House faces northeast, stands very close to sidewalk on southwest side of street. Quana Bank rises directly behind house. By Nantucket tradition this lower street (Union) was where the mates lived while the upper street (Orange), to the west and above the Union Street rooftops, had the captains' houses. Open ground to south and north of house, land slopes so basement above ground only on street side. Basement kitchen commonly used for makinghardtack and other ships' stores for the whaling ships.
2. Outbuildings: None.
3. Landscaping and walks, enclosures: Simple wood fence on property lines to east at sidewalk, retaining wall of timber and loose masonry at hill.

Prepared by George L. Wrenn, III
Nantucket, Massachusetts
August, 1966
July, 1971

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of the 1966 Historic American Buildings Survey summer project on Nantucket, Massachusetts. This is the first project of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Director was George L. Wrenn, III. Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Photographs are by Cortlandt V. D. Hubbard of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez, July 1971.